

**Testimony of Congressman Robert C. “Bobby” Scott
On H.R. 760, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007
Before the House Committee on Veterans Affairs
Thursday, February 15, 2007**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Buyer, I am truly pleased that you have taken the initiative to hold hearings on this important issue. As the only Member of Congress of Filipino ancestry, I am honored to come before this committee to present my views on this ongoing injustice. President John F. Kennedy once said, “A nation reveals itself not only by the men it produces, but also by the men it honors, the men it remembers.” H.R. 760, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007, will finally honor the veterans of World War II that have up to this point been forgotten.

Filipino veterans of World War II have for too long been denied the benefits that were promised them by the United States. Based on estimates from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Government of the Philippines, there will be less than 20,000 Filipino veterans of World War II living in the United States and in the Philippines this year. Speedy passage of H.R. 760 is critical because we are losing more and more Filipino veterans of World War II to the advances of age each day.

On July 26, 1941, as it became increasingly likely that the United States would enter World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an order to draft some 120,000 soldiers of the Philippine Commonwealth Army, who at the time were U.S. nationals, into the U.S. Armed Forces. These drafted Filipino soldiers fought on our behalf with the expectation that they would be entitled to the same benefits as any other member of the U.S. Armed Forces. These soldiers showed extreme courage at the battles of Bataan and Corregidor, fighting side-by-side with American soldiers. In 1946, President Harry S. Truman cited that during the War, Philippine Army veterans “fought with gallantry and courage under the most difficult conditions.” President Truman declared that it was a “moral obligation of the United States to look after the welfare of the Philippine Army veterans.” Unfortunately, President Truman’s promise remains unfulfilled. In 1946, Congress withdrew full benefits for Filipino veterans when the Philippines became an independent nation. Now, 60 years later, our Filipino veterans are still waiting to see those promises fulfilled.

We saw some progress in 2003 when we passed the Veterans Benefits Act, which finally extended V.A. medical care to 8,000 Filipino veterans living in the United States and made the New Philippine Scouts living in the U.S. eligible for burial in V.A. national cemeteries. But this was only the first step.

The people and the federal government of our great nation are indebted to the nearly 120,000 Filipinos who fought against tyranny in the Pacific in World War II for their extraordinary sacrifices. We are now approaching 62 years since the War in the Pacific ended and the Filipinos who fought under the command of U.S. generals and alongside American soldiers are still waiting to receive their rightfully deserved benefits.

I commend this committee for holding hearings on this important piece of legislation that has been introduced in the last several Congresses. I would like to personally acknowledge Chairman Filner, Congressman Darrell Issa, the Chairman of the Congressional Asian and Pacific Islanders Caucus Congressman Mike Honda, and all the other cosponsors of H.R. 760 for their diligence – not only in this Congress, but in the previous Congresses – in building support for and educating our colleagues about the importance of this legislation to right this terrible injustice.

I hope that this Committee will soon favorably report on H.R. 760 so that this Congress can finally provide the long awaited benefits that our Filipino veterans rightly deserve. Thank you again for inviting me here this morning to testify before this distinguished committee.